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OLC 71-0977

14 September 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Senator John Stennis re Agency
Involvement in Laos

1. This afternoon I met with Senator Stennis on another matter, but he brought up the question of what impact his letter to the President on the above subject had had within the Executive Branch. I said it had considerable impact but it wasn't quite clear what the ultimate effect would be. I said the White House was pressing us to come up with a suggested solution to the funding problem, but it was my personal view that in view of the Senator's position, and that of most of our other friends on the Hill, we were at the end of the road as far as funding this operation ourselves and it was up to the policy agencies to propose a solution. Senator Stennis agreed.

2. I asked the Senator whether the intent behind the letter was simply to get us out of the funding of this operation or was to get us out of all involvement in it. He said the funding problem was his immediate concern, but he felt we should definitely get out of this kind of large paramilitary operation as soon as feasible. He said we have trouble enough doing our primary job and we have more important work to do, in collecting and analyzing intelligence, than to get mixed up in large, controversial paramilitary activity. He said the Agency was much too important to risk its effectiveness by this sort of involvement and that if things like this had to be done there should be some "subrosa" outfit, perhaps under the Defense Department to do it.

3. I said we were supposed to be a subrosa outfit and this was the reason the policymakers had put this job on us. He said then what we needed was a "sub-subrosa outfit" but it shouldn't be in CIA--this was something the White House and the Pentagon should work out.

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4. Senator Stennis asked how we propose to handle our problems within the Administration, and I said we were trying to be good soldiers and do what we could to respond to the direction of the policymakers but we were having some difficulty in persuading them that in view of the attitude of the Congress we just couldn't continue to carry on as we had in the past, especially regarding funding. I repeated this appeared to be a problem that the policymakers themselves would ultimately have to face up to, and it would be a mistake for the Agency to get out in front and be suspected of trying to resist the expressed will of Congress. Senator Stennis said "you are exactly right."

5. In conclusion, I told Senator Stennis we were going to have a pretty rough time trying to adjust to the will of Congress and at the same time follow the directions and desires of the Administration, and we might have to call on him again for help and guidance. He said he would do the best he could for us.

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